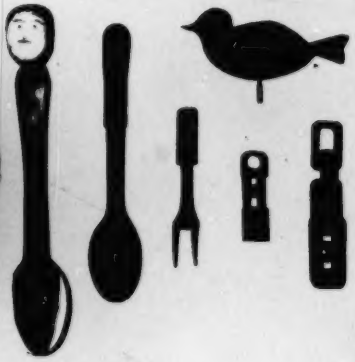
1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

322
532
[412]
[481]

IIa. Carved wooden spoon

IIb. Carved wooden stick with figure

[285]
[412]



IIc. Coil basket and carved wooden objects

[following p. xxxii - B]

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Georgia

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291
302
285
115

XVc. Cuffy Wilson and granddaughter at Sapelo

[following p. xxxii-S]

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285 Near this section lives a Negro basketmaker * who claims
462 that he is carrying on the tradition of his ancestors. He
322 stated that for generations the men of his family had en-
286 gaged in wood carving, basket making, and various phases
824 of weaving, and that the craft had been passed on from father to son.[70] He himself only makes baskets. White oak and bulrushes are selected as the material from which to make the baskets and they are stitched with scrub palmetto. Those made of bulrushes are of the coil type (Plate IIc). A A kind of thin rope is made from this grass which is then twisted around and around and sewn tightly together. The baskets made from white oak are plaited.[70] The types of baskets include hampers, flat clothes baskets, farm and shopping baskets, and the popular "fanner" which the Negro venders balance gracefully on their heads as they walk about the city, displaying a colorful array of merchandise.

322 Some years ago an unusual discovery was made near this
412 district when a boy noticed a carved spoon ** lying on top of
532 a rubbish heap. This spoon (Plate IIa), A which has been carefully preserved, is made of teak, and, judging from the dark polished surface of the wood and its general appearance, it might well be more than a century old. The bowl is shallow and about two by three inches and the whole length about seven inches. The most unusual feature of the spoon is the carved figure of the disproportionate little man forming the handle. Of particular interest are the flat cranium, the exaggerated ears, the gash-like mouth, the queerly shaped nose, the long dangling arms, and the short tapering legs which appear to be far too small for the rest of the body.[41b]

794 Near the Old Fort is the Peace Mission of Father Divine.†
346 This comparatively new religious sect has an estimated mem-

* *John Haynes, 933 Wheaton Street.*
** *Property of Edward A. Sieg, 128 West Jones Street.*
† *Though the meetings of Father Divine are common to many parts of the United States, especially in the North, where white worshippers form a sizable proportion of the followers of Father Divine, this description ac-*

A, [See Categories 285 & 412, plate following p. xxxii-B--Analyst].

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
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551 [115] "Ise quainted wid two ole men, one call Uncle Friday, duh othuh Uncle July," was the statement of a third Brownville resident.* "One wuz bawn on Good Friday an duh othuh on duh Foth uh July." [20]

262 We learned that certain foods are viewed with suspicion and are never eaten or allowed to be brought into the house.[65] The exact reason why these foods are forbidden was not explained to us. One woman said, "One ting I do lak is peanuts, but I dohn eat um. An I dohn let nobody [777] else eat um in muh house. I dohn know jis wy, but it bring bad luck all duh week." **

The palmetto tree, Robert McNichols † told us, supplies an edible substance in the form of palmetto cabbage taken from the center of the tree, about a foot below the top. This is the terminal bud of the tree, white in color, tender, and re- [252] sembling the ordinary northern cabbage. It may be eaten cooked or uncooked.[45a]

273 From the same tree a wine is made. We learned two different recipes for the preparation of this beverage. The wine is sometimes made from the cabbage, which when first cut contains a white sap. The chopped cabbage is put in a container where it is allowed to ferment, after which it is strained and sugar added.‡[45b] The wine may also be made from the dark blue palmetto berries. These are placed in a container until fermentation occurs after which the juice is extracted and sweetened. The wine is a clear dark brown and is said to have an excellent flavor. Incidentally, the 824 palmetto tree serves a variety of other purposes. Palmetto fibre is used in making baskets, rugs, bottle holders, and numerous other objects.[45]

• 285 327 Many of the Brownville residents are skilled in palmetto weaving and also in woodcarving. Walking sticks (Plate

000

* *William Mikell, 618 West 32nd Street.*
** *Beatrice Ward, 832 West 35th Street.*
† *Robert McNichols, Brownville.*
‡ *Ibid.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
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"She come frum Africa an uh name wuz Patience Spaulding," he began. "She tell me dat in Africa she use tuh eat wile tings. I membuh she use tuh go out in duh woods roun yuh an bring back some kine uh weed wut she cook. She call it 'lam quato.' It look lak pokeberry tuh me.

"She say all duh people in Africa loves red. Das how dey ketch um. I mean duh folks wut bring um yuh as slabes. Dey put up a red clawt weah dey would see it. Wen dey git close tuh duh boat, dey grab um an bring um yuh. She say das duh way dey ketch huh.

"Wen muh gran pray, she kneel down on duh flo. She bow uh head down tree time an she say 'Ameen, Ameen, Ameen.'

"Muh gran say deah wuz lots uh cunjuh in Africa. Deah wuz some men wut could make a pot bile widout fyuh an deah wuz some wut could fly.[68, 69a] She tell me dat deah wuz witches wut rode folks.[69] Dey could take off deah skins an hang um up an go out as cats.[68] Wen dey come back duh nex mawnin, dey would put on duh skins. Deah is folks roun heah tuhday wut says dey caahn sleep nights cuz duh witches ride um.

"Folks say duh road tuh Maringo is hanted.[59] I use tuh lib at Maringo some time back, but I nebuh did see no spirits. Once I tink I see one. Wen I git closuh, it tun out tuh be a big dog."[54]

Later that day we stopped at a neat whitewashed cottage and talked for a while with Isaac Basden,* a blind basketmaker[70a] about sixty years of age. The old man had learned his trade during his youth before he had gone blind and now supported himself comfortably in this manner.

We found him sitting in the front room, surrounded by his work. A number of finished baskets were also in evidence. They varied widely in size and shape and were all of the coil type.[70i] Many were fanners, while there were also a number

* *Isaac Basden, Harris Neck.*

1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

of large round baskets, about twenty inches in diameter, with matching covers that fitted well down over the rim. Isaac used bulrushes and grasses for his material and worked with a sure deft touch that insured sturdy construction.

He remembered that drums had been used for a variety of purposes during his youth. He said, "I use tuh dance tuh duh drum.[33] I recall wen dey beat duh drum tuh call duh people on Harris Neck tuhgedduh fuh a dance aw fewnul.[34] Cose, dey hab a diffunt beat wen dey call um tuh a settin-up aw fewnul frum duh one dey use tuh call um tuh a dance. Deah wuz two kine uh drum. One dey call duh kittle drum, an one wuz duh bass drum. It stan bout two an a half foot high. Dey use tuh alluz hab a settin-up wen somebody die. Wen folks would go tuh duh settin-up, dey would gib um bread an coffee.[37b, c]

"Dey still hole ribbuh baptisms yuh. Dey git tuh duh ribbuh an attuh dey pray an sing up on duh bank, duh preachuh take duh candidates down in duh ribbuh. Fo he baptize each ub um, he say a prayuh tuh duh ribbuh an ax fuh all duh sins tuh be wash away."[63]

Remembering what we had been told about the haunted road to Maringo, we questioned Isaac and he said, "Yes'm, I hab heah bout duh hanted road tuh Maringo on duh Young Man Road. Lots uh folks say deah is spirits roun deah.[59] Wen yuh try tuh pass duh fawk in duh road, duh spirits stop yuh sometime an wohn let yuh by. Some uh duh spirits mus be good, fuh Ise heahd one story bout a man who wuz passin by an all ub a sudden his hawse jis stop shawt in his tracks. Jis wouldn go anudduh step. Duh man try an try, but he couldn make duh hawse moob. Den he see a spirit come long an it take hole ub duh hawse bridle an lead him long. Duh hawse go right long. Den duh spirit disappeah. I hab heahd lots uh stories bout dat road but uh nebuh see nuttn muhsef."

Our next interview was an unusually delightful one. Sit-

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

463 because the remoteness of the islands means that most of the homes have to be built by the islanders themselves.

•285 178 463 The Sea Island crafts—jewelry, pottery, fans, baskets—often reflect African styles. Basketry is one of the dominant crafts of the region, and one of the oldest crafts of African origin in the United States. The baskets were originally made for practical purposes: winnowing rice, carrying clothing, cradling infants, fanning, sorting foods. These were called work baskets and were made of sturdy weaves and such materials as bulrushes and palmetto butts. While the basket weavers still make work baskets, they find that most customers are more interested in their "show baskets," which are lighter and more colorful but less sturdy and sometimes less expensive to make. The show baskets have various designs, ranging from a tiny candle holder to a gigantic woven bin. Whereas the work baskets are relics of the African utility traditions, the show pieces, including purses, vases, and glasses trays, show European influences and are usually decorative in intent. Within recent years the basket weavers of Mt. Pleasant, a town on the South Carolina coast, have gained fame for their skills with the traditional designs. Their baskets are displayed in educational centers and museums of art throughout the United States and elsewhere, and are purchased by art collectors the world over as survivals of an ancient African craft.

[531] [177]

285 171 Various observers have compared the baskets of the South Carolina coast with their African counterparts. According to one knowledgeable collector, there are strong technical links in weave pattern, design, and final product between the Carolina flat and fanner baskets and those of Nigeria, Togo, Benin, and Ghana.[38] The Sea Island coiling technique, the manner of stitching, and the pattern of functional use within an agricultural framework have been likened to the style of Senegal, though coiling, an old and widespread technique, is not by itself sufficient to identify an African source.[39] Given that similarities in technique and style may be misleading, the deciding factor in comparisons is the cultural milieu of which the baskets are a part. Because Africans were transplanted from the Gold Coast to America, and because Sea Island African-Americans continue to make baskets that are so like the African counterparts that it is almost impossible to differentiate them, it seems reasonable to accept the fact of a historical link.[40]

[178]

285 868 Children, both boys and girls, are taught basketmaking along with the other traditional skills. Boys and men most often gather mate-

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 21]

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

142
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868

Children learn the art of basketmaking at an early age.

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

•285
291

Miss Mary practices her ancient craft.

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina .

rials—pine needles, bulrushes, sweet grass, and palmetto leaves—for the girls and women to weave. The children learn to make baskets at around six years of age, and by the time they are in their teens, each has mastered a certain style and design that generally carries his or her trademark in the weave. Most of the baskets follow a simple coiling technique with a knot used as a base. The free ends of the sweet grass bundle are folded and then wound around the knot to begin a coil. Then an opening is pierced in the center knot and a strip of palm leaf is pulled through the opening, wrapped around the grass coil, and pulled back through a second opening made in the knot to anchor or station the coil. As this process is repeated, the coil begins to circle out from the center knot to create a basket base that is circular or oval. From this base, the basket is constructed by changing the angle at which one circular row is fastened to another. The palm stitch in the Mt. Pleasant baskets does not interlock with the stitches in previous rows of the coil. Consequently, the stitches appear to radiate out from the center knot in a linear way, much like the spokes of a wheel.[41]

The baskets, like the islanders' other crafts, are displayed along U.S. Highway 17, north of Charleston, or sold in the open markets near downtown Charleston where tourists crowd in daily to haggle over the prices of vegetables, hand-woven clothing, jewelry, and other wares, including items of brass, silver, and gold. Everything has a bargain price, and the basket sellers, like the other marketeers, are professionals in the art of bargaining. Baskets are priced according to size and difficulty of design, and it is a bad reflection on one's selling skills to be pressured into parting with a basket at a price lower than that established by the community; such an act may bring censure from one's family and from members of the community. The basket weavers, although seemingly unsophisticated and some of them certainly poor, are quite shrewd bargainers. I watched an exchange that took place when a very impressive car stopped in front of a basket stand along Highway 17. The driver, smoking a large cigar and accompanied by three elegantly dressed women, strolled over to look at the baskets. He picked up a tray of coasters and asked the basket weaver how much she would charge him to make coasters with specific dimensions for his beer cans. She hesitated, looked down at the basket that she was weaving, and said, "About twenty dollars." He then asked how long it would take for her to make them. She replied with some reservation that it would take her at least a week. He quickly took a

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina

There is continuity, too, in the religious services. Worship is shared with others who appreciate the place of religious exercises in the traditional structure of beliefs and values. The services continue to be alive, energetic, and thoroughly enjoyable. Sermons and prayers are still passed on orally from one generation to the next, rather than written down. The sermons are delivered by ministers who are natives of the island area, who speak the language, and who value the old traditions.

Basketry and marketing remain important, for two reasons. They have economic significance, but pride has also become a factor. The children learning the basket traditions now are being told that the patterns they are weaving repeat not only the patterns woven by their grandparents but those of their African ancestors before them.

Fishing and netting continue to provide livelihoods for many, though they are endangered by development and pollution of the waters. The islanders are "river and ocean" people. They gauge their workdays by the sun and by the ebb and flow of the tides. Some continue to use the marsh mud to fertilize their gardens. Others go to the banks of the ocean recesses to sit, fish, and tell tales of Ber Rabbit, tales often so vivid that many of the children swear they have actually seen him bounding down the island paths. The fishing techniques and the love and respect for the ocean are being passed on to the children along with the tales, myths, lies, and legends of island life.

The folklore and literature of the Sea Islands, unsurprisingly, are more alive on the remote islands than on the more commercialized ones. Though television, with its cartoon characters and talking pictures, is an arch rival for even the most gifted teller, on stormy days and dark, gloomy nights no one is permitted to watch television because the islanders believe that it draws electricity and increases the possibility that their homes could be struck by lightning. During these times the children are gathered and told tales of Ber Rabbit, hants, ghosts, witches, and hags, and no television program can hold an audience as spellbound as some of the island storytellers.

Gullah, the island language, is being affected by population changes, television, and the schools. Children are seldom named after days of the week any more, but most are still given two names: one to use at school and one to use at home. Many of the words familiar to the older generations are not being passed on to the children because the islanders, like most parents, want their children to attain good educa-

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

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11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
(1525-ca. 1880)
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
St. Helena Island

huge logs hollowed at one end. At these, two stood with their rude pestles striking alternately up and down. After the corn was shelled, the driver poured all upon a large hide or blanket and measured each person's portion into a basket, made by hand from pine straw and palmetto. After receiving the corn, the women ground it into grits, each waiting her turn at one of the hand-mills near the cornhouse.

With the aid of her children, the mother prepared supper from the rations just issued, supplementing the corn and salt pork with "turnip salad" or cow-peas from the "patch" back of the cabin, sweet potatoes roasted in the ashes, oysters or crabs from the creek, or with luxuries which she had bought at one of the island stores. Into the black pot placed on a bed of coals on the hearth went the grits to be boiled until thick and tender, or, perhaps, vegetables and fat pork might be cooking there. If so, the corn meal, which had come out of the mill together with the grits, would be made into a pone, cooked either on the open hearth or, if the family were thrifty, in a frying pan over the coals. The elders first helped themselves from the pot, and then turned it over to the children who ate to their satisfaction, and finally relinquished it to the dogs, invariably a part of the slave family, who licked it clean for the next meal.[28]

The mother also prepared the hasty breakfast eaten just after the conch blew at "day clean," if, indeed, the workers took time for breakfast, and filled her own and

[28] See Laura M. Towne, "Pioneer Work on the Sea Islands," *Southern Workman*, July, 1901.